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SUBJECT: URIBE CALLS TO RESOLVE CASES INVOLVING COLOMBIA'S MILITARY EXPEDITIOUSLY

1. (U) President Uribe called on Colombia's judicial system to resolve a number of high profile cases involving the country's public forces during a townhall meeting in Cartagena August 27.

BEGIN SPEECH EXCERPTS:

"I was talking to Attorney General Iguarn yesterday and I told him: 'Attorney General, I am going to talk about these cases publicly, with the highest respect for the independence of Colombia's judiciary, but these are cases we have to resolve promptly.'

So, today I am going to ask the nation's judicial system, the Prosecutor General's Office, judges, Supreme Court justices to help us solve these cases because we have to be accountable to Colombian citizens and we have to be accountable to the international community.

That they help us solve the case of Mapiripn (Meta). The country needs well documented and unobjectionable final decisions on that case. That they help us to solve the case of Santo Domingo (Arauca).

These are two very old cases and the only thing the Vice-President, the Foreign Minister and I can only say to the international community that Colombia's justice system is independent. But they look at the Colombian State as a whole, as a set of institutions, all connected.

So, these old unresolved cases make for a difficult dialogue with the international community.

The case of Arauca (that one is not that old, it took place a year and a half ago during this Administration), we have to move forward expeditiously on this case. Although some members of the armed forces have been arrested, we have been asked to expedite the prosecutorial stages; to advance faster and reach final decisions.

On the case of Cajamarca (Tolima), which happened at end of Holy Week last year. A country happy with its Holy Week vacation, with a greater number of tourists as a result of safe roads, and we experienced this deplorable event on the road from Cajamarca to Anaime Canyon. We cannot simply continue to say that the case is under investigation. This has to be explained.

In the case of San Jos de Apartad, we have a problem there: those who accuse the Army say they have witnesses and that Prosecutor General's Office has heard their testimonies, but the witnesses have not appeared, and the accusers say they are going to present their witnesses before the international community, but they have not done so either.

Look, our decision is: if the armed forces have committed a mistake, we have to admit it and bring this error to justice. But if members of the armed forces did not make a mistake, they cannot be falsely accused.

So, those with grievances against the armed forces should cooperate with our judicial system, which is honorable. They should not make charges against the armed forces and then immediately refuse the witness's presence. They should help the judiciary explain what happened in San Jos de Apartad, because it's very hard under these circumstances.

I wanted to refer to these cases; the Government is interested in total transparency in human rights. Our Army and Police daily try to improve the respect for human rights in Colombia. This is very important.

I would add the following: it has been our decision to recognize a mistake made by the Army or Police promptly. We have to recognize very quickly an involuntary mistake or any deceitful act committed by a member acting on his own; not wait for an investigative journalist to find the truth by force. We should come out and say it in good faith.

We should step-up and acknowledge it. It has been good for us whenever we have done so. It has been bad for us when we have found different versions, and we have not been able to

go out and say: `look, this is what happened here', as in the case of Guatarilla (Nario).

Our decision, both within the Administration and the armed forces, is to acknowledge the truth. But in those cases in which there is no possibility of finding the truth from the beginning, that the Government, cannot say with certainty: `this is what happened', we need the cooperation of the judicial system to make decisions within a sensible timeframe.

No abrupt nor negligent decisions, nor to postponing decisions indefinitely. Such workings damage the Colombian justice system and our rule of law."

END OF EXCERPTS

WOOD